View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

EMBRY-RIDDLE Aeronautical University SCHOLARLY COMMONS

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Volume 6 | Issue 19 Article 2

5-14-1999

The History of Social Psychology as the Study of Socialization and Fairness with Implications for Conflict: A Brief Review

Editor

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp

 Part of the Social Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation

Editor (1999) "The History of Social Psychology as the Study of Socialization and Fairness with Implications for Conflict: A Brief Review," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 19 , Article 2.
Available at: https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol6/iss19/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: The History of Social Psychology as the Study of Socialization and Fairness with Implications for Conflict: A Brief Review
Author: Editor
Volume: 6
Issue: 19
Date: 1999-05-14
Keywords: Conflict, Fairness, Socialization, Social Psychology

Abstract. This article highlights the history of social psychology as a research primer on socialization and fairness. The article also conceives of this primer as bearing on the essential nature of conflict.

There might be no conflict without notions of socialization and fairness. Or so might a naïve phenomenological analysis of conflict suggest. Without notions of socialization--that people and cultural products of people affect people--conflict could not involve interpersonal and intrapersonal effects. Without notions of fairness--that there are more and less preferred modes in which people and their cultural products affect people and in which such effects are influenced--conflict could not involve motives to influence interpersonal and intrapersonal effects.

In the context of the vital linkages among socialization, fairness, and conflict, one might note that these constructs--as far as they have ontological validity--are the most crucial to the study and practice of political psychology. In fact, a reading of the history of social psychological theory and research as inferred from its major contributors--an important source for political psychology--could suggest that this history has ultimately been about fairness, socialization, and conflict.

The contemporary history of social psychology is usually viewed as beginning with Wilhelm Wundt in the late nineteenth century. His Volkerpsychologies can be construed as describing national character(s)s in a very comprehensive manner. Each national character denotes the structure, function, process, and content of socialization and socialization's own self-reflexive properties. Especially from this self-reflexion come variants of fairness. In fact, one can infer from Wundt that conflict is unavoidable due to the self-reflexion of socialization and of fairness as well. Of course, this is also the case when different Volkerpsychologies come into contact.

In the early 20th century, William McDougall posited a number of socially defined instincts that seemed to imply a biological primacy engendering social behavior--a bottom-up approach--over a sociological primacy or top-down approach. Fairness arose as a psychological superstructure from conflicts within, between, and among instincts of one person as well as the various combinations of conflict between and among people. Many scholars consider McDougall's work and much that came after him--until very recently--as a drawing back from Wundt's comprehensiveness.

In 1927, C.L. Sherman's work on the moral self-attributed socialization to a number of layers of analysis from the biological through the metaphysical foundations. Unlike Wundt's work, however, Sherman's research focuses much more heavily on rationalism than empiricism. Notions of fairness and other elements of justice were deemed to be multidetermined. Sherman's construct of moral self was the product of and was destined to navigate continuous conflict.

In 1928, Hartshorne and May reported a series of studies carried on over several years by the Character Education Inquiry. The focus of this extensive web of empirical work was on the precursors and correlates of deception. The precursors and correlates studied were conceived as socialization variables.

Deception was studied in the context of being "unfair." Deception also was conceived as something placing the individual in conflict both with internal and external psychosocial standards. Finally, national character comparisons were made as to socialization, fairness, and conflict via the deception construct. Hartshorne and May's empirical foundation--while admirable--lacked theoretical breadth.

In 1930, Floyd Allport examined socialization processes in an institutional setting. The most salient focus of this examination was on notions of fairness as it applied to institutional functioning. Notions of fairness were based on patterns of social stimulation and social consciousness. Allport also closely studied the interrelationships of the social self, social conflict, and social behavior. Lastly, his work was intended to contain a significant applied significance

In 1930, Sigmund Freud's Civilization and its Discontents delineated the sequelae of socialization such as conceptions of fairness and varieties of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict. The psychodynamic approach to social conflict also focused on the continuous compromise formations--within individuals through societies at large--leading to crests and troughs in the salience of various approaches to fairness, in social order, and even social progress.

In 1934, George Herbert Mead analyzed how the individual develops a sense of self--i.e., self-consciousness--through social interaction via language and symbol. This symbolic interactionist approach to socialization suggested that any social psychological interaction had the potential for conflict, because the fairness of said interaction would become salient. Mead has been read as both espousing a determinist bent to evolving conceptions of the self and fairness and a freedom of self-construction and social constructions of fairness. The latter has been congruent with existential philosophers' contention that consciousness is free to form the self and seems to be a forerunner of psychology's postmodernist dalliance.

In 1935, Kurt Lewin's topological studies integrated the dynamic approaches of Freud and his disciples with empirical and experimental activities soon to be labeled "action research." Here the individual was immersed in a dynamic field of continuous socialization, fairness was often conceived as a class of valence relationships between the social actors and social stimulus objects, and conflict was engendered by impediments to acting on the motive forces arising from these relationships.

In 1958, Fritz Heider Issued an extremely significant work that can be construed as an analysis of notions of fairness arising from socialization experiences. Heider virtually reified balance theories that in retrospect seem to be based on Lewin's valence construct and variants of social comparison theories. When the various elements between, within, and among a perceiver and social stimulus and social object configurations were not balanced, unfairness was perceived and the perceiver was in conflict or perceived conflict between and among configural elements. Conflict--as with Lewin--engendered a motive force seeking its own self-dissolution.

By the time Skinner's collection of papers in Cumulative Record was published in 1959, socialization, fairness, and conflict could be explicated by a number of researchers influenced by the variants of behaviorism. While Skinner focused on behaviors and reinforcement histories per se, other researchers attempted to integrate the behaviorist with the dynamic. These latter behaviorists have seemed to be less than successful in parsing fairness as the content of lay phenomenology, characteristics of a behavioral system, or covert responses labeling behavioral contingencies.

Gergen's research from 1973 through the mid-1990s seemed at first to threaten the very constructs of fairness and socialization. While most previous work in the behavioral sciences intimated some immutable standard of fairness and adaptive socialization, Gergen's historical take on social psychology and his focus on the social construction and transformation of knowledge often was construed as a radical relativism without moral and ethical bearings. More recent interpretations suggest less radicalism and in fact a very strenuous moral and ethical engagement.

Buss's evolutionary psychology textbook, published in 1999, in some surprising ways is a throwback to the work of Wundt with its biopsychosocial and empirical emphases. Both socialization and fairness are taken as evolved psychological mechanisms that help resolve conflict exemplified as impediments to survival and reproduction.

My contention is that the huge mass of 20th century social sciences theory and research bearing on socialization and fairness are but varying combinations of the classical sources described above. Through social construction, social transformation, and psychocultural evolution, the future may see but the same and different combinations of these sources. This conclusion may be perceived by many in the field as "conflictogenic," "conflictopathic," and/or offered by a reviewer that has not been appropriately socialized and is not appropriately fair. Such a perception could only underline the power of social psychology as a source for political psychology. (See Allport, F. H. (1933). Institutional behavior. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Buss, D. M. (1999). Evolutionary psychology. Boston: Allyn & Bacon; Freud, S. (1930). Civilization and its discontents. London: Hogarth, 1930; Gergen, K. J. (1973). Social psychology as history. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 26, 309-320; Hartshorne, H., & May, M. A. (1928). Studies in deceit. Book I, General methods and results. Book II, Statistical methods and results. NY: Macmillan, 1928; Heider, F. (1958). The psychology of interpersonal relations. NY: John Wiley; Lewin, K. (1935). A dynamic theory of personality. NY: McGraw-Hill; McDougall, W. (1960). An introduction to social psychology. NY: Barnes & Nobles. (Original work published 1908); Mead, G. H. (1934). Mind, self and society. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press; Sherman, C. L. (1927). The moral self. Boston: Ginn; Skinner, B. F. (1959). Cumulative Record: A Selection of Papers (3rd ed.). New York, N.Y.: Appleton-Century-Crofts; Wundt, W.) (Keywords: Conflict, Fairness, Socialization, Social Psychology.)